DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 150 391 08 CE 014 676

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TITLE Case Study Report #20. Alvin and Edith Oster.
INSTITUTION Mountain-Plains Education and Economic Development Program, Inc., Glasgow AFB, Mont.
SPONS AGENCY National Inst. of Education (DHEW), Washington, D.C.
PUB DATE Aug 75
CONTRACT NE-C-00-3-0298
NOTE 28p.; For related documents see CE 014 658-681 and ED 110 610 ; Some pages may not reproduce clearly

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 HC-$2.06 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Career Education; Case Studies; Community Involvement; Counseling Services; Demonstration Programs; *Disadvantaged Groups; Economically Disadvantaged; Educationally Disadvantaged; *Employment Experience; Family Programs; Federal Programs; Followup Studies; Income; Individualized Programs; Job Placement; Job Training; Participant Satisfaction; Program Effectiveness; *Residential Programs; *Student Characteristics; Student Development; *Student Participation; Student Problems; Vocational Education
IDENTIFIERS Mountain Plains Program

ABSTRACT

This document presents one in a series of twenty-three case studies derived from in-depth interviews using a sampling of former participants in the Mountain-Plains program, a residential, family-based education program developed to improve the economic potential and lifestyle of selected student families in a six-state area. Each case study contains the following information about a specific student family: biographical data; participation in the educational and community programs; home, income, placement, and employment data; stated problems and/or satisfactions; summaries of the participants' personal and social development; individual ratings of the program; scripts of personal interviews; interviewer comments; and individual test scores and self-assessments. This document presents specific findings on Alvin and Edith Oster, who entered the program with three children and determination. The follow-up study reports that the Osters successfully completed the program and found steady employment with a bright future. (Names in these studies have been changed.) Two other documents are included in the series: a report which examines work and income variables for the group (ED 110 610) and a report which summarizes group findings on personal and social development (CE 014 681). Specific documentation for the instruments utilized in the study are included in both of these related documents. (BM)

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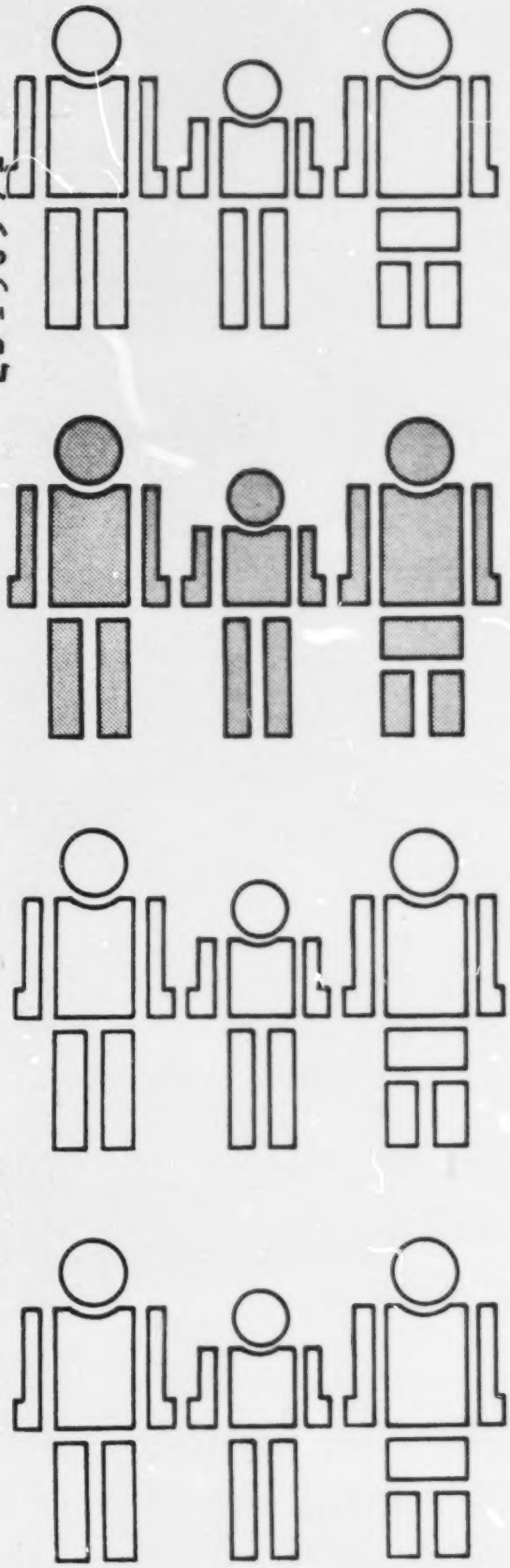

CASE STUDY REPORT #20

ALVIN & EDITH OSTER

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH
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MOUNTAIN PLAINS EDUCATION ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM INC.

CASE STUDY REPORT

ALVIN AND EDITH OSTER

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August, 1975

A Product of Research Services Division
David A. Coyle, Director

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PREFACE

Reports in this series are derived from in depth interviews using a stratified random sample of former Mountain-Plains students. Interviews were conducted from November, 1974 through January, 1975 by Mountain-Plains professional research staff. Case Study Report 1 examines Work and Income variables for the group. Case Study Reports 2 through 24 include specific findings on each family included in the sampling. Case Study Report 25 summarizes group findings on personal and social development. A summary of the research design for the Case Study Reports is documented in: Coyle, David A.; Conrad, Rowan W.; and Myers, Douglas D. In Depth Case Study of Exited Families: A Summary of the Research Design for Phase 1 Preliminary Effects Study. Glasgow, Montana: Mountain-Plains Press, 1974. Specific documentation for the instruments utilized in the study are included in either Case Study Report 1 or Case Study Report 25. All names in these studies have been changed.

Michael C. Fenenbock
Series Editor

David A. Coyle
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CASE STUDY REPORT

ALVIN AND EDITH OSTER

BACKGROUND

The Osters came to Mountain-Plains from Blackfoot, Idaho where they were interviewed by the Idaho Mountain-Plains office in May of 1972. They were living on a small acreage just outside town, and at the point of application the preprogram interviewer was confident about the stability of the family, writing, "I was very impressed with the Oster's ambition and determination to make it strictly on their own by hard work. They would make excellent Mountain-Plains participants." The preprogram interviewer indicated that Al would often spend as much as 30 to 40 hours a week beyond his normal 40 hour work week creating supplemental income for the family, "a very outgoing and very hardworking individual, which highly recommends him for the Mountain-Plains Program."

At the time Al was employed in a laboring position paying $504 per month--an income which he supplemented by work on farms throughout the area. The family consisted of Al, his wife, Edith, and three children, 2 girls and 1 boy, ranging in age from 2 to 9. Al showed interest in either a plumbing, carpentry or refrigeration occupation. Without any previous training, Al was not a veteran, and Edith had no specific skills. The family utilized no welfare assistance, did not receive food stamps or free school lunches, and, although they had a savings account during the previous 6 months, it had decreased. The family reported having life insurances as well as medical insurance and said they used "a very strict budget." Indeed, "He (Al) keeps

a detailed set of books showing family income and expenditures that would put most businesses to shame," the Mountain-Plains interviewer reported.

Active in the community, the Osters belonged to the Church of the Latter Day Saints--in fact, were officers in the church--the son participated in Boy Scouts, and they were active in the local chapter of the Parent Teacher Association. At the time, the Osters were buying their house using an FHA loan and paying $69 for a Title 235 home. The home, four rooms and a bath, was well constructed and sturdy. They payed $35 a month for utilities. The Osters had moved only once in the last 5 years--considerably lower than most pre-center families at Mountain-Plains. They subscribed to magazines--Edith likes to sew clothing for the family--had a family doctor and felt they did not currently need health services.

Interviewed at that time, Al's employer said, "Mr. Oster is an excellent employee. We hate to see him go but we do not want to stand in his way of furthering his education. He is dependable, honest, and all those nice adjectives." The pre-program interviewer included under general comments that "the home life was very good, the father was very concerned about his family, thus extra working for supplemental income, and the home itself was very clean and tidy." Al suffered a speech impediment (he still has it today) the interviewer commented, "although this does not seem to be a hindrance to him. Rather than speaking very seldom, he is rather talkative and quite outgoing."

PROGRAM PARTICIPATION

Al entered the refrigeration occupational area at Mountain-Plains, completed that course work, and while waiting for Work Experience to begin, entered

carpentry--which he knew the basics of quite well. He finished carpentry, was still waiting for Work Experience in Refrigeration, and began attending classes in drafting! This type of enthusiasm is not typical of Mountain-Plains students, although those entering the program strictly for an education often do participate. Edith took office education and studied bookkeeping and also completed the program.

While on center, the Osters were very active in student government. Al was not only a block group leader, but vice-president and later president of the MOWINDS Council as well. Heretofore, Al had not been active in a public position and was pleased by the fact that his fellow classmates thought highly enough of him to elect him to this position.

The Oster's counselor recorded an exit interview at the time they left Mountain-Plains describing the family--strong points and weak. The counselor concluded, "The Oster family is very stable, they are involved very much so in community affairs, they highly value their children and their family and often place the goals of the family above those of their own. The attitude that Al had towards Mountain-Plains was very positive. He said that the program had done him 'a whole bunch of good,' and the only regrets that he had were that he could have taken more training in other areas." In addition, "Al gets along well with almost everyone, which is perhaps his strongest point and this relates to his employability which indicated that he would work well with almost everyone. His is very conscientious, he never does a job half way and due to his hardworking, Christian upbringing, as he called it, he should be a very good employee." Al is a person of very high motivation--this stems mainly from his strong devotion

to his family. He feels, literally, a moral obligation to his family and this again relates back to his strong ties with the church. When they left Mountain-Plains, they took some $500 in incentive pay with them and returned to their home state.

The Oster's employability report indicated that Al was skilled in carpentry, refrigeration and as a truck driver--a skill he obtained before entering Mountain-Plains. Edith's employability report was somewhat different. "Although she has skills as a basic accountant, Edith still has strong ties with her family and is very willing to stay home with her family until they are all of school age which would be a couple years from exit." Nevertheless, the report concluded, "She is very stable and a very mature person and should work well for almost any employer."

PLACEMENT

Immediately upon exit Al was employed by Page's Supply in Blackfoot, Idaho as a carpenter earning $520 per month, where he remained until Spring of 1974. Six months post exit, Al and Edith were still living in the Blackfoot area, and Al was earning $607 per month at Page's Supply--now in a supervisory position which afforded him not only a cash salary but also a percentage income. Edith was working part-time as a bookkeeper for a refrigeration shop in the Blackfoot area earning $2.00 per hour.

During the six month interview,[1] the Osters indicated that from recent employment they had earned $3,600, required no welfare benefits and no unemployment compensation, and had no income other than those listed. They were not

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[1]Mountain-Plains follow-up at 6 months is performed by State Office Staff.

using food stamps, free commodities, or free school lunches, although at that time they had made an investment in their home and in some land. They had a savings account and it was growing. The family did use a budget. Still active in community organizations--the PTA and Scouts as well as the church--Al had become an officer in the Boy Scouts.

His employment was steady and his employer at Page Supply said, "He does a very good job at whatever task he has and we enjoy having him employed here." Additional ratings were very good, indicating that Al makes a very positive impression on his employer.

HOME AND INCOME

At the point of the case study interview (18 months post exit), the Osters were still living in the same residence in Blackfoot. The employment situation had improved considerably--Al is now a partner in the construction firm and earns between $900 and $1,000 per month. (During the course of the interview it became apparent that Al was going into a dealership of prefabricated homes and he said that if he did this his income would increase to approximately $1,200 per month. Edith is working for the Oster-Page Corporation (formerly Page Supply) as a bookkeeper at $2.00 an hour.

In the previous 6 months, the family said, they had earned some $6,000. They had investments--about $1,500 in construction equipment--and only minor debts. However, they did not use a savings account nor medical insurance, although both have life insurance and the family still uses a budget. Still active in PTA and church, they now nearly own their house--the house is government subsidized for $35 per month, leaving them a payment of $62, the same situation as at 6 months.

The interview was conducted on a Saturday afternoon in the Oster home. The house itself is some 5 years old, very well kept, very neat, very orderly. When the interviewer arrived, Mrs. Oster was reclining, resting actually, she is in her eighth month of pregnancy. Mr. Oster had just returned from work--3:00 p.m. on a Saturday. The family setting, the house itself, is in a very pretty spot--a small stream runs by the house. There are some 10 to 15 other houses situated nearby--all relatively new and well within the definition of a suburb. The Oster's have three children with another on the way, all of whom seem well behaved and normal teenagers--very talkative young ladies, and the son very much interested in the interview, although he did not get in the way. The family itself appears to interact very well.

Al is very proud of the fact that he is becoming a success. The interviewer noted Al had several floor plans tacked to the wall on the basement stairway and that he was proud to point out that he had been able to draw these plans up as a result of his training at Mountain-Plains. Al appeared very positive towards Mountain-Plains, and indicated that due to his experience in student government and the education received, he had become a much more well rounded person.

The Tennessee Self-Concept Scale was administered to both Edith and Al. Al scored very evenly across the scales--all within 5 percentage points of the national means. The greatest deviation was between family self and social self--he rated his family self slightly above the mean and social self slightly below the mean. This indicates Al is a very stable person--he knows what he is doing, where he is going and where he has come from. (See Figure 4.)

Edith was somewhat less even in scores, although she too rated well within normal limitations. Her lowest score was self-identity--one standard deviation below post program means. Her highest score was in moral/ethical self--standard deviation above the mean. From the Tennessee Self-Concept Scales both Edith and Al would be considered very normal people.

On the Neal Seeman Powerlessness Scale, Al rated a scale score of 5--extremely high for his peer group. The scale score exceeded all means on the original study and from his peer group--he exceeded the mean by some 2 standard deviations. This powerlessness indicates that he is somewhat cynical, perhaps not to an unhealthy degree. He also scored high on the Anomie Scale--a scale score of 3. This exceeded his peer group by 1 standard deviation. Both the Anomie and the Powerlessness Scales validate indications that Al is skeptical of the world in which he lives. (See Figure 3.)

Edith scored zero on the Powerlessness Scale as well as the Anomie Scale--very low scores. On the Powerlessness Scale she rated some 2 standard deviations below the mean. Edith also rated 1 to 2 standard deviations below the mean on the Anomie Scale. These low Powerlessness and low Anomie scores indicate that Edith is extremely naive in regard to the world in which she lives.

EMPLOYMENT

Al is self-employed--a partner in a construction firm--and it was decided not to administer the Job Descriptive Index or the Minnesota Satisfactoriness Scale to him. Only the general work scales of the JDI was administered--the Job Motivation Scale and the Work Alienation Scale. Overall, he scored a scale of

60--quite high for his exited worker peer group which had a mean of 37.8 and a standard deviation of 9. This put Al considerably higher on the scale than any other member of his peer group. The Job Motivation Scale produced a scale score of 14--which is equivalent to production workers and slightly above technical engineers. This score also equalled the scale scores produced by his exited peer group. The Work Alienation Scale produced a scale score of zero--some 1½ standard deviation below his group mean and considerably below the original study reference group.

When questioned, Al related that he was "very content" and "very satisfied" with his work. He retains a high degree of motivation, and says he is not "afraid to work."

RATING THE MOUNTAIN-PLAINS PROGRAM

When questioned about Mountain-Plains as an influence in their lives, both Al and Edith felt that it had been very positive. Both felt job training, English, Career Guidance, and Work Experience were all of "great help." Counseling, Consumer Education, Recreation, Health, Home Management and Early Childhood, however, were listed as of "little help." (See Figure 5 and Table 2.)

Al says job training was "useful, because I had the chance of entering the drafting field as well as carpentry and refrigeration." Health, however, was not useful, "there was too much reading and most of the information that I got there I already knew."

Asked if they would return to Mountain-Plains knowing what they now know about the program, both Al and Edith responded definitely yes. When asked

whether or not the job skill learned at Mountain-Plains was adequate, Al said yes, "because I can still do the work that I was trained for." Edith felt "more on the job training would have been good," but both agreed, "the math and English were adequate for our training." When asked if they would change occupational choice, Al replied no, "the occupational training I got at Mountain-Plains is what I'm doing now." Asked to compare themselves before and after Mountain-Plains, in every category Al felt he had improved after Mountain-Plains. He rated improvement in self-confidence (the largest improvement), self-knowledge, competence and industriousness, dependability and reliability, and social contact. Clearly the managerial skills needed to run an operation are those Al feels he has improved in the most. In general, the work related characteristics indicated here all showed measures of improvement. Edith also felt that she had made improvement--particularly in punctuality, self-confidence, competence and accuracy. (See Table 1.)

When asked if they had suggestions for Career Guidance, Al said, "It was okay but I don't particularly use what I learned to a great extent. (Both he and Edith felt they knew their occupational choices before they entered the program.) When asked for suggestions regarding Counseling, both agreed "it was useful and it helped the ones that needed it." But, Al said, "it was too privately oriented and dealt too much in the private lives of the students."

General social adaptability questions indicate the Osters feel they can cope with everyday problems. Both say they are satisfied with their current life style and that their work gives satisfaction as do the children and their church activity.

When asked what was "not going just the way they wanted," Al replied, "My grandmother, she owns the land we live on, wants us to comply with her wishes in some matters that just aren't up to her." Edith agreed, that this was probably the most disturbing factor. When asked whether or not their family was "more" or "less healthy" since leaving Mountain-Plains, the Osters said "more healthy." They indicated no difficulties deciding how to spend the money, and have not had what they consider serious problems in dealing with their children's behavior.

FEMALE INTERVIEW

This section was administered to Edith in Al's presence, which may have affected her responses--although Edith appears to be secure and did not seem to be troubled by any of the questions presented. Edith said her only activity outside the home is through the church, where she is a Sunday school teacher and youth advisor. Satisfied with the role she plays in the family, Edith says she feels appreciated. She does things for herself occasionally and feels no guilt. Edith likes herself, although for "no reason specific, except I'm dependable." She and Al relate well, she says, they discuss problems that bother him as well as problems that bother the family. "Al has changed since leaving Mountain-Plains, mainly in the area of increasing self-confidence for himself, and he has better social relations with people around him now."

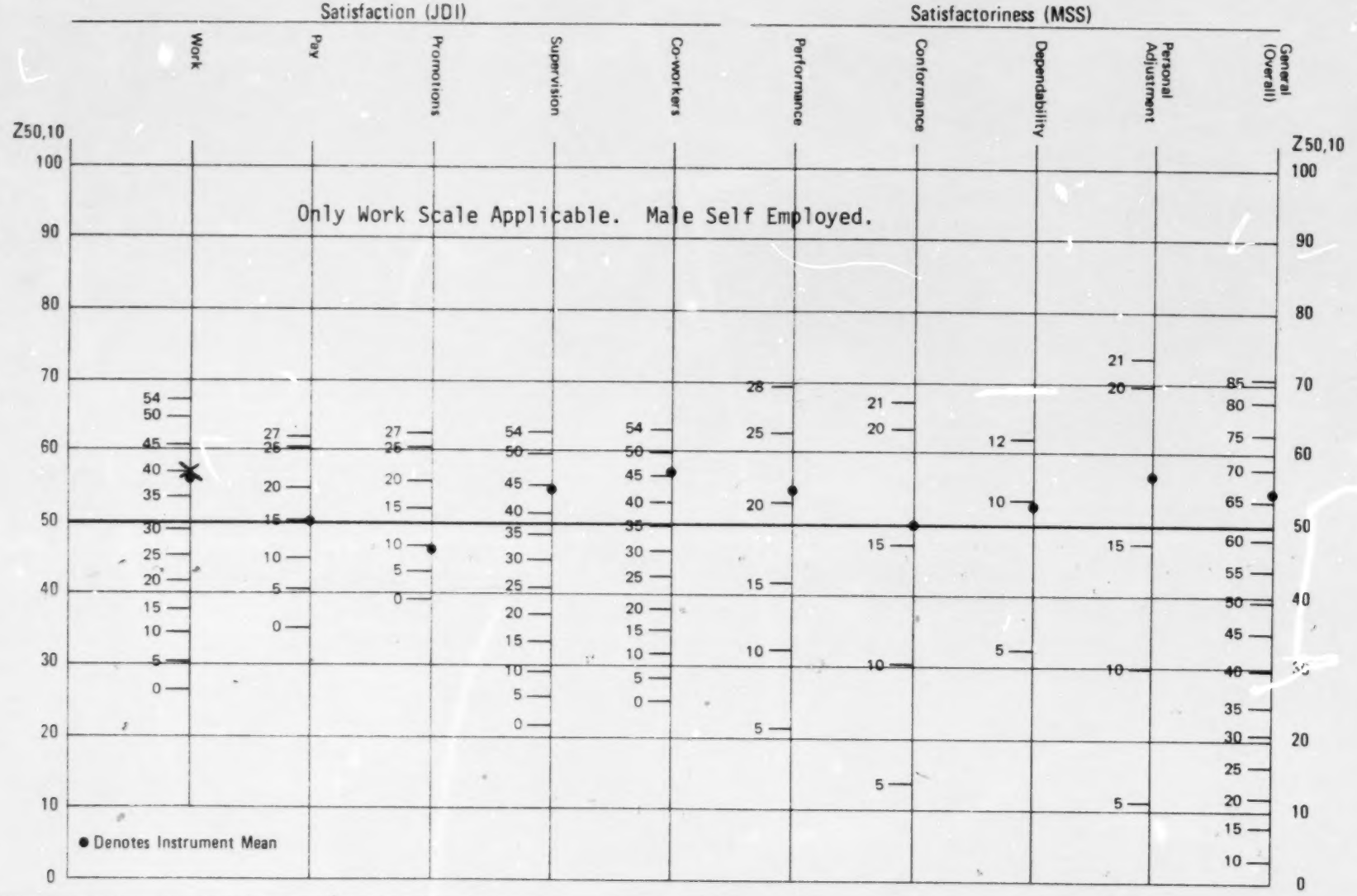
SUMMARY

The Oster family has achieved a great deal of stability--economic and life satisfaction. Al is extremely involved in his work--he is the type that will be very conscientious about the work he does do--is successful, and satisfied. The

family appears to be very stable. The Osters are beyond a doubt the most successful family that this interviewer has come in contact with, not only economically but also skill-wise and job satisfaction-wise.

Figure 1

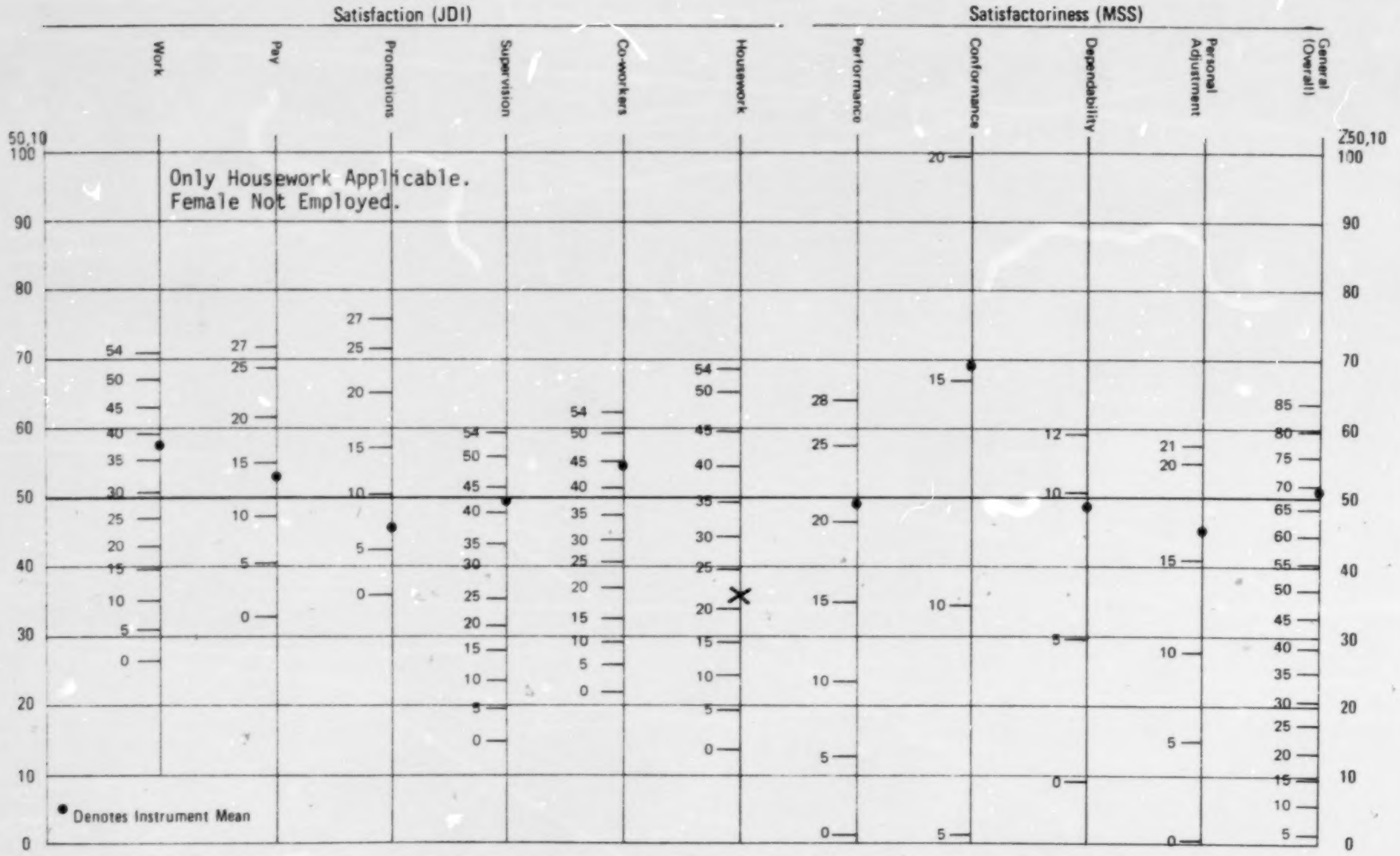
SATISFACTION AND SATISFACTORINESS – MALE



Note: Profile based on entering student scores.

Figure 2

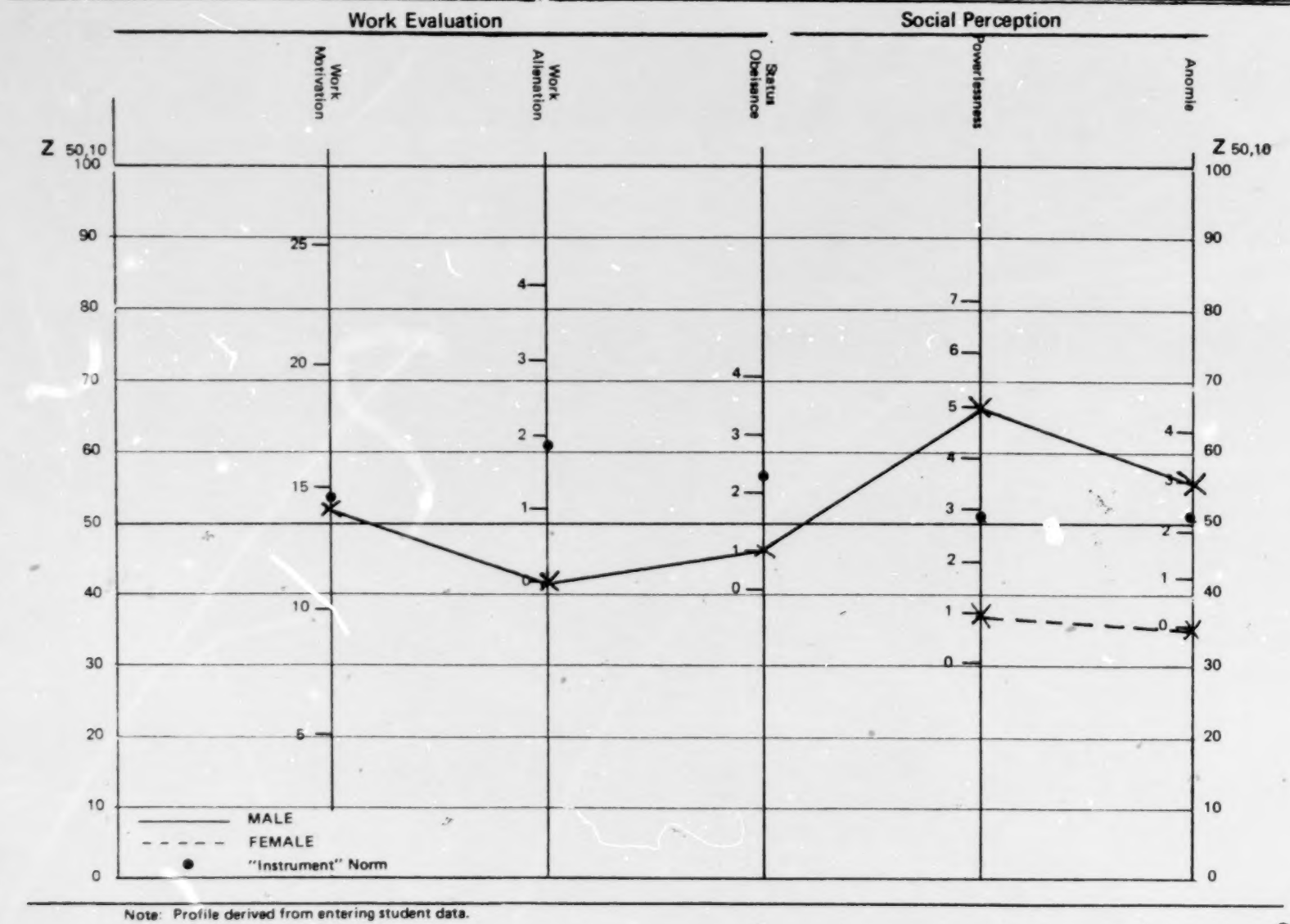
SATISFACTION AND SATISFACTORINESS – FEMALE



Note: Profile based on entering student norms except "Housework" which is based on instrument norm for employment.

Figure 3

MOTIVATION AND ALIENATION

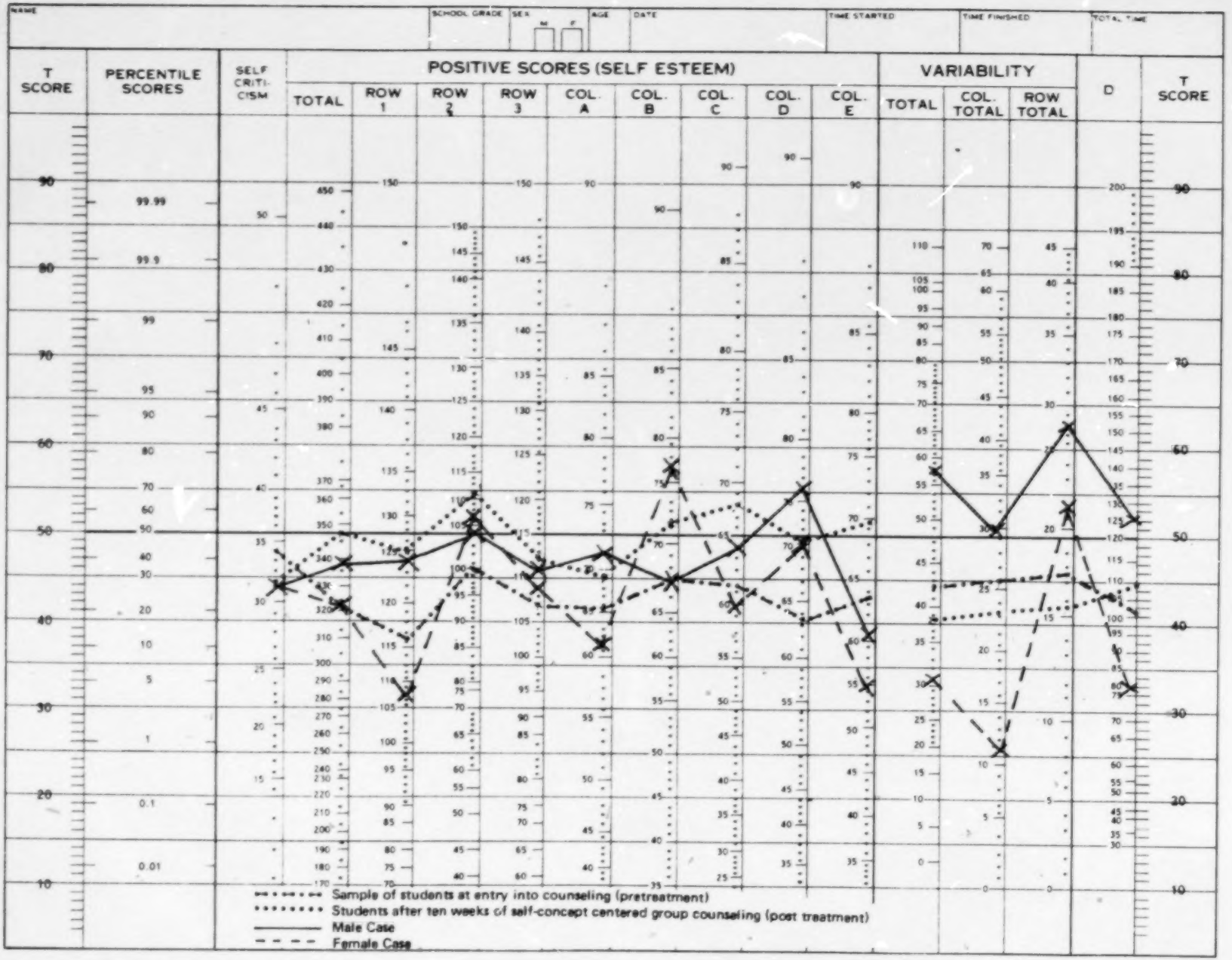


Note: Profile derived from entering student data.

Tennessee Self Concept Scale - Figure 4

PROFILE SHEET

Counseling Form



Note: This is the standard profile sheet for the TSCS.

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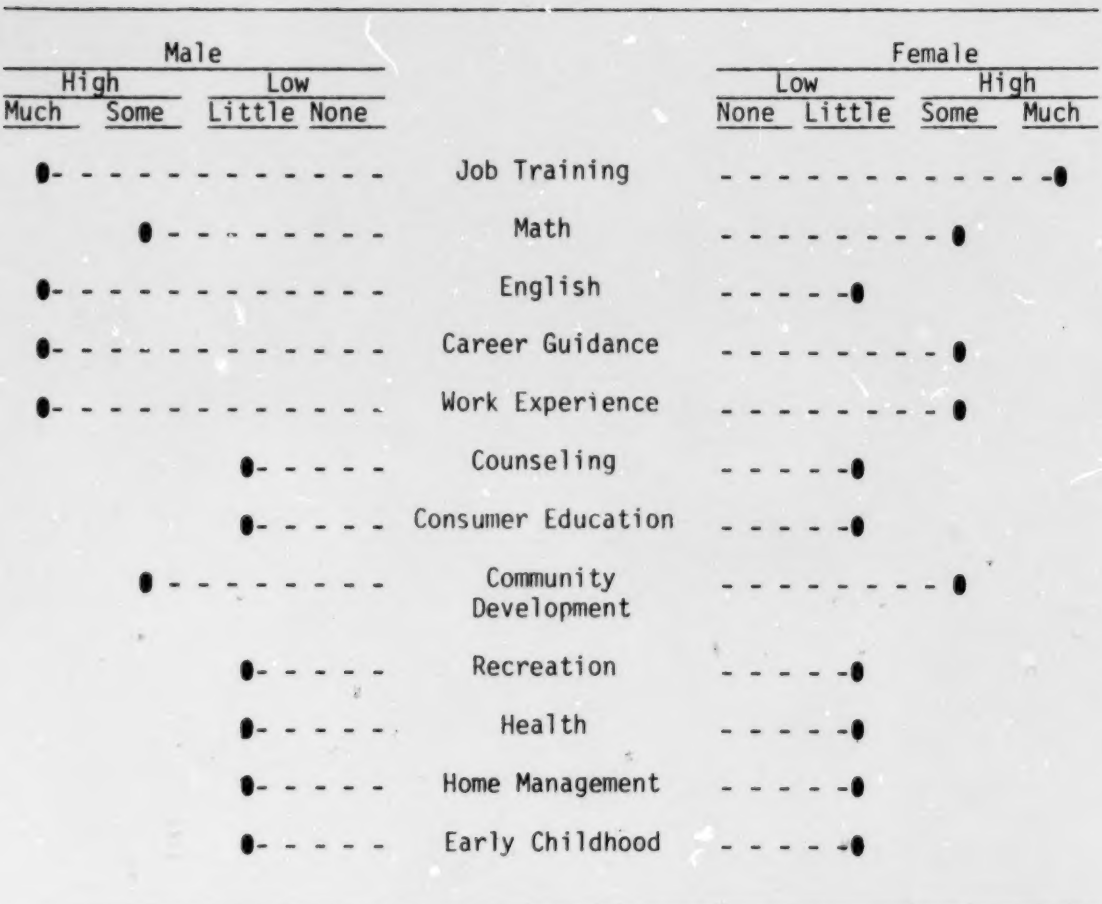

FIGURE 5

UTILITY RATING OF MOUNTAIN-PLAINS PROGRAM ELEMENTS

TABLE 1

SELF RATING OF PERSONAL AND WORK TRAIT CHANGES

Male		Female	
Improved	Regressed	Improved	Regressed
Self-Confidence		Punctuality	
Self-Knowledge		Self-Confidence	
Competence		Competence	
Industriousness		Accuracy	
Social Contact			
Dependability/ Reliability			
Responsibility (personal)			
Ambition			

TABLE 2

GENERAL QUESTIONS

1. "Rate Mountain-Plains as an influence in your life."

	Very Positive	Positive	Neutral	Negative	Very Negative
Male		o			
Female		x			

2. "Knowing what you know now, would you have chosen Mountain-Plains?"

	Definitely Yes	Probably Yes	Don't Know	Probably No	Definitely No
Male	o				
Female	x				

3. "What is your rating for your current life in general?"

	Completely Satisfied	Well Satisfied	Neither Extreme	A Little Dissatisfied	Very Dissatisfied
Male	o				
Female		x			

4. "Rate your success:

		Completely Successful 9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	Completely Unsuccessful 0
The year before M-P."	Male Female	Data Not Available.									
Now."	Male Female										
Five years from now."	Male Female										